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What am I and What am I doing?¹

1. Introduction

There is a deep connection between Anscombe's argument that "I" is not a referring expression and *Intention's* account of those species of self-knowledge whose objects are our intentional actions and bodily movement: *practical knowledge* and *knowledge without observation*.² Anscombe's slogan "I do what happens" cannot be understood until we recognise that when E.A. utters that slogan she does not, in saying "I", refer to herself.³ The assumption that the so-called 'no-reference thesis' can be resisted while the account of action set out in *Intention* is embraced is based on a misunderstanding of argument of "The First Person" and the status of its conclusion; removing that misunderstanding helps to illuminate the concept of practical knowledge and brings into view a novel account of the relation between self-consciousness, agency and first-person thought.

2. Some background on method

Our starting point is with some background on method. One reason that philosophers have missed the connection between Anscombe's philosophy of action and her view on "I", is to be found in the way that they have approached Anscombe's "The First Person". When people speak of that paper they talk as if what Anscombe is trying to do in it is to compel her reader into accepting a radical "no-reference thesis" on pain of Cartesianism. This reflects the mind-set that everyone was going along quite happily with the perfectly plausible and in-good-order thesis that "I" is a referring expression—albeit one that produced some recalcitrant data and required some mildly elaborate bits of epistemology and metaphysics to fix-up—until Anscombe (following Wittgenstein) came along and tried to force us to give it up. "Well, we won't!" is the natural response. Commentary on "The First Person" tends to contain lots of talk of "resisting", "blocking" and of capitulation being "unnecessary", alongside attempts to demonstrate that self-conscious self-reference is something that can be adequately theorised. There is also a lot of emphasis on how quiet, reasonable, plausible, intuitive and unassuming the view that "I" is a referring expression is, in comparison to the "radical", "obscure", "extraordinary" and "incredible" position that Anscombe attempts to compel us toward. The 'reference

¹ Thanks to John Schwenkler for inviting me to speak at the *Interpreting Anscombe* workshop at Florida State University, at which I presented an ancestor of this paper. And to the other speakers (Jennifer Frey, Richard Moran and James Doyle) and audience at that event. Thanks to Clare Mac Cumhaill for many illuminating and encouraging philosophical conversations. And thanks to Kim Frost and an anonymous referee for detailed and helpful comments and criticisms, to which I have not adequately responded.

² G. E. M. Anscombe, "The First Person", in Samuel Guttenplan, ed. *Mind and Language* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975), pp. 45-65. Reprinted in Anscombe, *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind: Collected Philosophical Papers Volume II* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1981), pp. 21-36. All page numbers refer to its 1981 reprinting. G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1951), 2nd Edition.

³ *Intention*, p. 52.

view' represents good old fashioned common sense and intuition: we are only to accept Anscombe's radical revision as an absolutely last resort.⁴

In fact, for all that it is treated as a truism to say that the 'reference view' is 'common sense', it is more of a philosopher's truism than something available to everyday reflection. The statement "*I* is the word each of us uses to refer to herself" is pretty much unintelligible to anyone who is not a philosopher. To borrow from Wittgenstein: someone who says that has already taken the "first step" in philosophy. It is true that Anscombe's paper contains a *reductio* argument: she says "[I]f '*I*' is a 'referring expression', then Descartes was right".⁵ However, the centrality that this bit of her paper has acquired is undeserved and has had a very bad effect on people's ability to see what Anscombe is saying in that paper and to recognise its significance.

Thinking about the method of *Intention* can help to bring out what is wrong with this 'save our Intuitions!' attitude toward "The First Person" and allow us to begin to see the way of "get[ting] to understand self-consciousness" that Anscombe is offering.⁶

Intention begins with Anscombe's remark that we are "in the dark about the character of the concept" to which "intention" refers.⁷ The extent to which we were "in the dark" is quite clear by the end of the book. At the start, we were rather inchoately inclined to think that the concept of *intention* was the concept of something "in the mind", something that caused or accompanied certain actions or events which, in virtue of being so caused or accompanied, were called "intentional". By the end of the book, if we follow Anscombe, we come to see that the concept of *intention* is not one under which psychological states or occurrences fall. Rather the word "intention" refers to a concept that is the capacity to employ a particular "form of description of events". Many predicative descriptions owe their meaning to that form (for example "sending for") and many more can appear in it (for example, "offending").⁸ To say "I intend to do such and such", rather than "I will do

⁴ The conclusion is variously described as "bizarre" (José Luís Bermúdez, *The Paradox of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1998), p. 16); "extraordinary" (Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 215); and "startling" (W. W. Taschek "Referring to Oneself", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 15, 1985, pp. 629–52: p. 629). de Gayensford goes so far as to suggest as an explanation of Wittgenstein's apparent agreement with Anscombe that "Wittgenstein ... is being mildly ironic" (Maximilian de Gayensford, *I: The Meaning of the First-Person Term* (Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 19). To deny that "*I*" is a referring expression is, complains Edward Harcourt, to put "a common-sense view of ... "*I*" ... out of reach" (Harcourt 'The first person: problems of sense and reference', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 46 (2000), pp. 25–46: p. 45). John McDowell argues that we should "refuse to accept" Anscombe's conclusion and sets about showing how we can "block the inference" that creates the dilemma between the reference thesis and Cartesianism ("Referring to Oneself", in Lewis E. Hahn (ed.), *P. F. Strawson*, Library of Living Philosophers (Open Court), pp. 129–145: p. 133. This is merely a sample and readers will be able to call to mind numerous other instances of this attitude.

⁵ Anscombe, "The First Person", p. 32.

⁶ Anscombe, "The First Person", p. 25.

⁷ Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 1.

⁸ Anscombe, *Intention*, pp. 84–5. See Kurt Baier 'Critical notice', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 38 (1960), pp. 71–81 and Rachael Wiseman, *Anscombe's Intention* (London:

such-and-such”, is make it explicit that “to do such and such” appears in that form. This is something that may or may not be otherwise clear, as is shown by Anscombe’s: “I am going to be sick” and “I am going to fail this exam”.⁹

A central methodological premise of *Intention* is that the character of a concept—the sort of capacity that a person with that concept has acquired—is not something that can be “read off” the linguistic data nor something that we should expect to be available to intuition.¹⁰ We display our grasp of the concept of intention—we exercise the capacity that it represents—when we say “That was an expression of intention” or “she pushed him intentionally” or “What was your intention in sending that letter?” We also display it when we act, reason practically or say what someone is doing. And also when we find others’ behaviour—including their verbal behaviour—intelligible or unintelligible, reasonable or irrational. But having the capacity to do something and being able to describe that capacity are quite different things. While Anscombe was writing *Intention*, her husband Peter Geach was writing *Mental Acts*; he recruits Aquinas to articulate a difference in the way that “complexity” can figure in the exercise of a capacity:

When our understanding frames a proposition about the colour of the glass, it does not assert that this colour is complex, but on the contrary that it is simple.— If, however, the qualification is taken to refer to the person who understands, then the statement is false; for the way it is with our understanding when we understand is different from the way it is with the thing we understand, in its actual existence. When our understanding understands things that are simple, it may understand them in its own complex fashion without understanding them *to be* complex.¹¹

If we locate the simplicity in the understanding and the complexity in the object of understanding then we will assume that the character of a concept is something we can get hold of intuitively and that the nature of the quality, state, property that the concept picks out is the difficult thing to grasp. This is to get things the wrong way around.

Anscombe’s brilliance—or, at least, one part of her brilliance—was to recognise that the capacity represented by “intention” could be revealed in all its complexity through a description of a special use of the question “Why?” Or, to put it another way, she realised that what a person with the concept of *intention* can do is take part in the highly sophisticated “Why?”-“Because...” language-game, and that this language-game is something that she could describe.

Routledge), 2016.

⁹ Anscombe, *Intention*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁰ I am here attributing to Anscombe a view of concepts as capacities but I will not defend this attribution here. For a detailed presentation of the view of concepts I have in mind, see Peter Geach, *Mental Acts* (London: Routledge and K. Paul) 1957, esp. §5.

¹¹ Peter Geach, *Mental Acts* (London: Routledge and K. Paul) 1957, p. 40.

To be clear, in calling this a “language-game” I am not suggesting that the capacity is merely linguistic. Learning the “Why?”-“Because...” language-game is not like learning the alphabet. Anscombe, like Wittgenstein, was not interested in language as an “abstract symbolism”, nor even as the “production of words properly arranged into sentences on occasions we vaguely call ‘suitable’”.¹² She was concerned with language as an activity rooted in, and revealing of, the structure of human life. As we will see later, investigating this part of our language—the part that is structured by the concept of intention—is part of an investigation of self-consciousness.

Anscombe recognises that the fact that we find it intuitive or plausible to say something-or-other about the character of a concept to which a word refers, is neither here nor there when it comes to the question of that concept’s character. Indeed, what we find intuitive or plausible to say is usually a reflection of “superficial grammar”—facts about the “production of words” and when their production would be “suitable”.

Let me illustrate this with two quick examples from *Intention*, both from the near the start.

Recall the opening sections of *Intention* in which Anscombe offers a definition of prediction:

a man says something with one inflection of the verb in his sentence; later that same thing, only with a changed inflection of the verb, can be called true (or false) in the face of what has happened later.¹³

She notes that on this definition, expressions of intention and commands will count as predictions. As we know, seeing this—that is, seeing that an expression of intention is a species of prediction, and seeing what is common between expressions of intention and commands—is crucial to her later exposition of expressions of intention for the future. But, Anscombe remarks, it is “natural to feel an objection both to calling commands, and to calling expressions of intention, predictions”.¹⁴ In the former case the objection is down to “superficial grammar”: commands are cast in the imperative rather than the indicative. The example “Nurse will take you to the operating theatre” removes this superficial difference: here is a set of words produced on an occasion that functions simultaneously as evidence as to what will happen, command and expression of intention. We can imagine a language in which the form “NN will do such-and-such” was used for all these sorts of expression (with “NN” being the name of the speaker when what was said was an expression of intention) but in which the distinction between these species of prediction was still marked in the ways that people responded to the expression, the

¹² Anscombe, ‘The Question of Linguistic Idealism’ in *Acta Philosophica Fennica*, vol. 28, n. 1-3 (1976), pp. 188-215: p. 204. See also Gordon Baker ‘Wittgenstein’s “Depth Grammar”’, reprinted in Katherine J. Morris (ed.), *Wittgenstein’s Method: Neglected Aspects. Essays on Wittgenstein by Gordon Baker*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 73–91.

¹³ Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 2.

¹⁴ Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 4.

questions and justifications that were relevant, the sorts of institutions and social practices that existed, and—crucially for our current topic—the sorts of errors that it was possible for the speaker to make.¹⁵

Second, Anscombe points out that “it is often ‘odd’ to call [a man’s actions intentional]”.

If I saw a man, who was walking along the pavement, turn toward the roadway, look up and down, and then walk across the road when it was safe to do so, it would not be usual for me to say that he crossed the road intentionally. But it would be wrong to infer from this that we ought not to give such an action as a typical example of intentional action.¹⁶

If we attend only to “suitable occasions” for using the word “intentional” we will exclude from our investigation many cases where the concept is at work.

Imagine someone responds to *Intention* by saying “We should resist Anscombe’s conclusion about the concept of intention because it goes against our intuitions about the meaning of the word ‘intention’”. And suppose that person set about showing that given certain sophisticated moves it would not be necessary to take Anscombe’s line—perhaps this person has been able to picture a state of mind with adequate complexity that is not obviously incoherent or inconsistent with the facts. This person’s attention would be myopically focussed on §19, and Anscombe’s argument by *reductio* that there can be no feature, *I*, which could play this role.¹⁷ Such a person would not have understood the project of the book.

If the foregoing is right, it suggests we have been approaching “The First Person” in the wrong state of mind, philosophically speaking. When we focus only on blocking the *reductio* argument, we are like the reader of *Intention* who sets her sights solely on §19. Rather than expecting a “knock down argument” against the reference view, the essay should be read as we are to read *Intention*: as an investigation into the character of a concept and the capacity it represents, a concept about which we are “in fact pretty much in the dark”.¹⁸ That investigation takes in not just the “production of words” but “activities *other* than the production of language, into which a use of language is interwoven”. Taking that attitude toward that essay means that talk of things like “resisting the conclusion” are quite misplaced.

My main concern in this paper is not, however, to highlight methodological connections between “The First Person” and *Intention*. The point of emphasising the shared

¹⁵ To be clear, to say that “NN” is the name of the speaker is not yet to say that when NN says “NN will do such-and-such” her name “NN” is employed *as a name* or in that utterance.

¹⁶ Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 29.

¹⁷ Anscombe, *Intention*, pp. 28-30.

¹⁸ Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 1.

methodology is to remove some barriers I think have stood in the way of a proper appraisal of the connection between Anscombe's account of the character of the concept of intention and her account of the grammar of the first-person pronoun. And this is really what I want to talk about. My thought is: once we have the character of the concept of intention in view it we can begin to see why Anscombe says, and what she means by saying, that our self-consciousness is manifested through our employment of sentences that "do not involve the connection of what is understood by a predicate with a distinctly conceived subject".¹⁹ These parts of her work are connected because the linguistic practice described in *Intention* is a linguistic practice in which language is employed in just this way. To have the concept represented by the word "intention" is to have, among other things, the ability to speak of oneself using the first-person pronoun in ways that manifest self-consciousness.

3. "Unmediated thoughts"

It should not be especially controversial to suggest that there is a deep connection between the conclusion of "The First Person" and *Intention's* account of how it is possible to *know without observation* what one is doing and to "do what happens".²⁰ "The First Person" uses an examination of just those first-person thoughts that are the subject of *Intention* to investigate the grammar of the first-person pronoun. The "I-thoughts" Anscombe considers in that essay are, she points out, "those relating to actions, postures, movements and intentions".²¹ That is, just those first-person thoughts that belong to the class of things that a man knows without observation. She is clear too that it is no accident that she picks this class. Rather, she says that it is because "those thoughts both are unmediated, non-observational, and also are descriptions (e.g. 'standing') which are directly verifiable or falsifiable about the person of E. A." that they are well-suited to bringing into view the use of the expression "I".²²

Toward the start of "The First Person", Anscombe considers the possibility that our objections to calling "I" a name are based on superficial grammar. Is it the case, she asks, "that 'I' is only not called a proper name because everyone uses it only to refer to himself?" This would make our objections to calling "I" a name similar to our objections to calling "Open the door" a prediction. To test this supposition she "construct[s] a clear case of such a name".²³

¹⁹ Anscombe, "The First Person", p. 36.

²⁰ Much of the best work on *Intention* in recent years has begun with the thought that the book contains an account of a species of self-knowledge that can provide insight into the nature of self-consciousness and the self. See, for example, Sebastian Rödl's *Self Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007); Michael Thompson, 'Anscombe's *Intention* and Practical Knowledge' in Anton Ford, Jennifer Hornsby and Frederick Stoutland (eds), *Essays on Anscombe's Intention* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 198-210. However, this work proceeds on the mistaken assumption that the insight can be part of an account of self-consciousness on which the use of "I" is an act of self-reference.

²¹ Anscombe, "The First Person", p. 35.

²² Anscombe, "The First Person", p. 35.

²³ This example, it will be noted, focusses on the view that "I" is a name. It will no doubt strike

Imagine a society in which everyone is labelled with two names. One appears on their backs and at the top of their chests, and these names, which their bearer cannot see, are various: “B” to “Z” let us say. The other, “A”, is stamped on the inside of their wrists, and is the same for everyone. In making reports on people’s actions everyone uses the names on their chests or backs if he can see these names or is used to seeing them. ... Reports on one’s own actions, which one gives straight off from observation, are made using the name on the wrist. [...] It may be asked: what is meant by “reports on one’s own actions”? Let us lay it down that this means, for example, reports issuing from the mouth of *B* on the actions of *B*. That is to say: reports from the mouth of *B* saying that *A* did such-and-such are prima facie verified by ascertaining that *B* did it and are decisively falsified by finding out that he did not.²⁴

One of the things that is striking about the case as described is that in this imagined society reports of one’s own actions are given “straight off from observation”.²⁵ But in *Intention*, Anscombe notes that descriptions of what one is doing are given “straight off *without* observation”.²⁶ There is no argument in “The First Person” on this point; it seems to have been clear to Anscombe that the existence of a class of descriptions that are true of a man that he knows without observation is part of a linguistic practice in which first-person thoughts are expressed without acts of reference. If this is right, then far from being a feature of “superficial grammar”, our reluctance to call “I” a name is picking up on something deep about the difference between them. Namely, that “A” and “I” belong to different linguistic practices, and that the linguistic practice to which “I” belongs is connected to the linguistic practice described in *Intention*.

the reader that Anscombe must do more than show that “I” is not a name if she is to establish that it is not a referring expression; names are just one of the ways in which we refer and it is much more common to assimilate “I” into the category of demonstratives or indexicals than names. This point is well made and would be significant were the dialectic of “The First Person” as is traditionally presented. However, on the re-orientation I am proposing, the point of this example is to bring out an insight into the relation between the use of “I” and the expression of practical knowledge, an insight that reveals how deeply the use of “I” diverges from the use of expressions that are used to refer to objects of predication. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me on this point.

²⁴ Anscombe, ‘The First Person’, p. 24.

²⁵ Note that seeing this passage in light of *Intention* rules out any interpretation of Anscombe on which the mark of knowledge without observation is that it is non-inferential (see, for example, Hanna Pickard, “Knowledge of Action without Observation”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 104 (2004): pp. 205-230; Edward Harcourt, Harcourt “The first person: problems of sense and reference”, *op. cit.*). Anscombe’s meaning in calling “separately describable sensations” the mark of observation is not that the object of the sensation must be different from the object of knowledge; rather, it is a mark of observation that what is seen (heard, felt, etc) could be given using a description other than that giving the material object of sight (hearing, touch, etc.). See Anscombe, “Intentionality of Sensation: A Grammatical Feature”, in Butler, R. J. (ed.), *Analytical Philosophy - Second Series* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), pp. 158-180.

²⁶ Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 14.

Why is it that when Alice, in the A-practice says “A is replenishing the water supply”—and *replenishing the water supply* is a description of what she is doing—this is a “report made straight off from observation”; while when Ilana, in the I-practice says “I am replenishing the water supply”—and *replenishing the water supply* is a description of what she is doing—she says this “straight off without observation”?

To explain this we need to look at what Anscombe says about the class of things a person *knows without observation* and about the use of language that express that knowledge. Once we have that in view, we will return to “The First Person”.

4. Knowledge without observation

Anscombe introduces the class of descriptions that are true of a person that she knows without observation near the start of *Intention*. The context is the following: Anscombe wants to describe the distinction that we make when we say that a mention of something past gives a *cause* rather than a *reason* for what I did. When I say “I killed him because he killed my father”, the past event is (usually) a reason. When I say “I jumped because she banged the cymbals” the past event is (usually) a cause. (I say “usually” because we can imagine suitably unusual circumstances in which his killing my father caused me to kill him and in which her banging the cymbals was a reason for me to jump). Anscombe wants to describe this distinction without “begging any questions”. She says:

This can be done as follows: we first point out a particular class of things which are true of a man: namely the class of things which he *knows without observation*. E.g. a man usually knows the position of his limbs without observation. It is without observation, because nothing *shews* him the position of his limbs.²⁷

With this distinction to hand, Anscombe is able to define the concept of a *mental cause* and make the distinction she is after.

This part of her argument is not relevant for us now but I mention it to draw attention to the fact that the class—*things which a person knows without observation*—is introduced by way of an illustration. Anscombe does not hypothesise that such a class exists and nor does she argue that it does. Just as the distinction between descriptions that are true of a person which she *knows* and those which she *does not know* is one that we are invited to *recognise* by way of an illustration (*sawing a plank* vs *sawing Smith’s plank*), so too with this distinction.

Having introduced this class, the next ten sections of *Intention* systematically mark off classes of descriptions which belong to it but are not of intentional actions. The results, summarised in §16, are *prima facie* far from illuminating. Anscombe, you will recall, gives a rather dispiriting disjunctive set which includes descriptions of past history (so long as what is mentioned involved the ideas of good and harm); descriptions which interpret the action; and descriptions which mention something future.²⁸ The work of

²⁷ Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 13.

²⁸ Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 24.

§§18-27 is to reveal the unity of that disjunctive set by using the question “Why?” to reveal the “A-D” order.

In §28, Anscombe says, quite suddenly:

We must now look more closely into the formula which has so constantly occurred in this investigation: “known without observation”.²⁹

This is the first point at which the distinction introduced at §8 has been subject to scrutiny.

This had its first application to the position of one’s limbs and certain movements, such as the muscular spasm in falling asleep. [...] In enquiring into intentional action, however, I have used the formula quite generally, and the following objection will very likely to have occurred to a reader: “Known without observation” may very well be a justifiable formula for knowledge of the position and movement of one’s limbs, but you have spoken of all intentional action as falling under this concept. Now it may be e.g. that one paints a wall yellow, meaning to do so. But is it reasonable to say that one “knows without observation” that one is painting a wall yellow? And similarly for all sorts of actions: any actions that is that are described under any aspect beyond that of bodily movements.³⁰

This section marks the beginning of Anscombe’s discussion of practical knowledge and practical reasoning.

What I want to draw attention to here is that *Intention* does not include an answer to the question “is it reasonable to say that one ‘knows without observation’ that one is raising one’s arm?” The reader is not expected to raise that worry; though Anscombe does acknowledge that “This topic is certainly a difficult one, deserving a fuller discussion”. Such a discussion, she says, “would be out of place” here.³¹ The worry that Anscombe does address is whether it is legitimate to say the same of descriptions that go beyond that of bodily movement. Her answer to that question is: yes—you will see that it is legitimate once you understand what practical knowledge is. And you will understand that once you drop some unfortunate assumptions about the character of practical reasoning.

5. Practical Knowledge

To understand what it would take to show that it was “reasonable” to speak of *knowing without observation* when the description goes beyond bodily movement, and why Anscombe says that the topic of knowledge of bodily posture and movement “would be

²⁹ Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 49.

³⁰ Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 50.

³¹ Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 50.

out of place” in *Intention*, we need to go back to the section in which Anscombe introduces the class of descriptions *known without observation*. Here is what she says:

[W]here we can speak of separately describable sensations, having which is in some sense our criterion for saying something, then we can speak of observing that thing; but that is not generally so when we know the position of our limbs. Yet, without prompting we *can say* it. I say however that we *know* it and not merely *can say* it, because there is a possibility of being right or wrong: there is a point in speaking of knowledge only where a contrast exists between “he *knows*” and “he (merely) *thinks* he knows”.³²

When interpreters have examined this passage looking for—as Godfrey Vesey put it—the “philosophical treasure” of an account of bodily self-knowledge which would reveal “the way in which the mind is embodied”, they have focused on the question: what does Anscombe mean by “separately describable sensations”. Also noted by Vesey is the fact that this treasure hunt “*seem[s]* to lead, not to philosophical treasure at all, but to ... absurdity”.³³ The problem is that Anscombe does not give any such account in *Intention*. What she describes instead is three features that make it appropriate to speak of “knowledge” in relation to a description which is employed by a subject “without observation”.

1. The description is employed by a subject who has, and who is exercising, a “capacity to say” when they are as the description specifies (this rules out blurting out, guesses, speculation, etc.)
2. The capacity to say is one that is unmediated by sensory input—which is to say, the capacity is one the exercise of which is independent of the exercise of sensory capacities (this is not, of course, to say that the acquisition of the capacity is independent of the possession of sensory capacities; nor that the loss of sensory capacities would not affect the possession and exercise of the capacity to say)
3. What is said—the description that is given—is “also a description which is verifiable or falsifiable about the person whose saying it is”.³⁴

³² Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 14.

³³ G. N. A. Vesey “Knowledge Without Observation”, *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 72, p. 198-212: p. 201.

³⁴ This shows why, as Adrian Haddock has pointed out, we might refrain from calling expressions of knowledge without observation “reports” (Haddock, “The Knowledge That a Man Has”, in Ford, Hornsby and Stoutland (eds), pp. 147-169: p. 158). These features are, I take it, compatible with his “general account of knowledge *without* observation: its possession does not require, in addition to the actuality of its object, that its possessor acquire ... an observational reason that shows or suggests that its object is indeed actual” (p. 149). However, while Haddock’s focus on the “actuality of the object” invites speculation as to a special kind of causal process at work, nothing of the kind is suggested by (1)-(3).

Any capacity fitting this description will issue in utterances of the form “I am such-and-such”. And where ‘such-and-such’ is true of the person we will say: she *knows* she is such-and-such. And when we say “she *knows* she is such-and-such”, “such-and-such” will belong to “the class of things which [s]he *knows without observation*”.

In describing when we speak of *knowing without observation* what is left completely open by Anscombe is the nature and source of the capacity to say. Anscombe specifies the meaning of “*knowledge without observation*” while giving only a *negative* criterion of this capacity. She says only that the exercise of the capacity must not be mediated by the senses. But this in no way implies that whenever we speak of knowledge without observation we are speaking of *the same capacity*, a capacity that is common to all such cases. Rather, we may have—in fact we do have—many different capacities the exercise of which can be an utterance “I am such-and-such” that fits Anscombe’s formula.

This explains why Anscombe says that the topic of knowledge of bodily posture and movement “would be out of place” in *Intention*. The capacities in question when it comes to saying how one’s limbs are arranged and moving are the sort of capacities that a baby lacks, a toddler is acquiring and most children have. We know a child has many of them when she can play “Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes”. We know she has some mastery when she can follow the order “Do a cartwheel”.

The topic of *Intention* is not the capacity to say how one’s limbs are arranged and moving but the capacity to say what one is doing (intentionally). This is not to say that there is *no* connection: as we will see shortly, a person who lacked the capacity to say—without sensory mediation—how her limbs were arranged and moving would be severely restricted in her capacity to say—without sensory mediation—what she was doing (intentionally). However, the fact that the capacity to perform a synchronised swimming routine includes or presupposes the capacity to swim which presupposes the capacity for voluntary bodily movement does not imply identity.

The discussion of practical knowledge begins when the interlocutor objects to Anscombe’s description of the application of the question “Why?” At the point at which the objection is made, Anscombe has already used that question as a tool to display the order that is there whenever the concept *intention* has application. The objection comes after the example of the murderous well-poisoner is used to excavate the “A-D order”.

The objection is: you have taken for granted in displaying this order that descriptions which go beyond that of bodily movement can be *known without observation*. This was taken for granted, recall, because any answer to the question “Why are you doing such and such?” which showed that “doing such and such” was not *known without observation* instantly excluded the description *doing such and such* from the A-D order. But why should we accept this criterion given that it seems quite incredible that a person could *know without observation* what they were doing? If it turned out at that *any* description that went beyond a description of bodily movement was thereby one that

could be known only by observation, then it would turn out that the question “Why?” could not, after all, be used to “display the order” to which “intention” refers.

Thus:

“Known without observation” may very well be a justifiable formula for knowledge of the position and movement of one’s limbs, but you have spoken of all intentional action as falling under this concept. ... But is it reasonable to say that one “knows without observation” ... actions ... that are described under any aspect beyond that of bodily movements?³⁵

The interlocutor is not asking here for an account of a capacity to say, without mediation by the senses, how one’s body is moving; she is asking instead for an account of an capacity to say, without mediation by the senses, what one is doing where “what one is doing” is, e.g. “replenishing a water supply” or “painting a wall”.

Anscombe immediately answers:

My reply is that the topic of an intention may be a matter on which there is knowledge or opinion based on observation, inference, hearsay, superstition, or anything else that knowledge or opinion are ever based on; or again matter on which an opinion is held without any foundation at all. When knowledge or opinion are present concerning what is the case, and what can happen—say Z—if one does certain things, say ABC, then it is possible to have the intention of doing Z in doing ABC; and if the case is one of knowledge or if the opinion is correct, then doing or causing Z is an intentional action and it is not by observation that one knows one is doing Z.³⁶

In giving this answer Anscombe describes what it is for a person to have the capacity to say, without observation, “I am doing Z”, where “Z” is a description that goes beyond bodily movement.

Take a case. If I am of the opinion that today is Thursday and of the opinion that a person who goes to the library on Thursday can cast her vote, then I can have the intention of casting my vote in going to the library today. If I do this and my opinion that today is Thursday and my opinion that a person who goes to the library on Thursday can cast her vote are *correct* then *casting my vote* is an intentional action and it is not by observation that I know I am *casting my vote*. What I say—“I am casting my vote”—is an expression of practical knowledge. Practical knowledge is the exercise a capacity to say that is not mediated by sensation. It is not mediated by sensation because the capacity I exercise is one that comes from “knowing my way about”—as Anscombe puts it:

³⁵ Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 50.

³⁶ Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 50.

Although the term “practical knowledge” is most often used in connexion with specialised skills, there is no reason to think that this notion has application only in such contexts. “Intentional action” always presupposes what might be called “knowing one’s way about” the matters described in the description under which the action can be called intentional, and this knowledge is exercised in the action and is practical knowledge.³⁷

The exercise in action of “knowing ones way about” is practical knowledge. Practical knowledge can be expressed in an answer to the question “Why?”: “I am casting my vote”. Note that “I am casting my vote” can be an expression of practical knowledge even in the necessarily rare case in which “knowing my way about” with respect to voting does not result in my casting my vote. This is what makes it right to say that I *know without observation* I am casting my vote: if the exercise of the capacity to say left no “possibility of being right or wrong”—because whenever it was said it was right—then there would be no “point in speaking of knowledge”.

6. Practical knowledge and reference

I have argued that “non-observational knowledge” is not a label for an epistemological capacity, one that is so specialised it delivers knowledge of only one object—viz., me. Rather, we speak of a person “knowing without observation” in relation to a description which is employed by a subject whenever features (1)-(3) are present.

This brings into view a rendering of Anscombe’s “paradoxical formula” “I *do* what *happens*”. When I am on my way to the library to cast my vote and I say “I am casting my vote” then what I say is—when I am able to say it because of my vote-casting capacity, which I am exercising—an expression of practical knowledge. *I do*. When you, looking on, can describe what is happening using the same description, “NN is casting her vote”, then what happens is what I do, and I know *without observation* what is happening.

One advantage of seeing Anscombe’s views on “I” in the context of her account of practical knowledge is gets us away from the idea that rejecting the reference view leaves us with “I” as a simple or crude linguistic device: an obsolete term serving as nothing but a syntactic marker. Rather, what has happened is that a picture of “I”-use as involving a simple capacity (reference) with a complex object (self) has been replaced by a set of complex capacities the exercise of which is not mediated by sensation and so does not require picking out any object. A dummy-word would indeed not express self-consciousness nor belong to a linguistic practice in which descriptions occur *in* the form of description “intentional action”. The use of a subject-term in expressions which do not involve predication is part of a highly sophisticated language-game. It is in that language-game that we will locate the deep grammatical structure that underpins the “logician’s

³⁷ Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 89.

rule”: If *X* asserts something with “I” as subject, his assertion will be true if and only if what he asserts is true of *X*.³⁸

What would need to be spelled out to complete the description of that language-game is the relation between saying how your limbs are arranged and saying what you are doing—what “what you are doing” is given in a description that goes beyond bodily movement. I do not have space to do that here, though above I gave a hint of the sorts of capacities that would be relevant. What needs to be noted is that a person who had only a very limited capacity to say how their limbs were—where this was not merely failing in the “production of words”—would be someone who had only a very limited capacity to *move* their limbs and to *hold* a posture. Such incapacity would impose serious limitations on that person’s agency. A person who had *no* capacity for movement or posture—whose body was radically beyond her control—could have practical knowledge only insofar as she could use others as the instrument of her agency by giving orders. The A-people, are *all* in such a position, and so there is no-one for them to give orders to. As a society they lack the concept *intention*.

The capacities *to say* that are manifested in intentional action “do not involve the connection of what is understood by a predicate with a distinctly conceived subject”. Rather, they involve a subject *doing* what she understands by a predicate, and *saying* what she is *doing*. Anyone, including her, can “look and see” whether that person is as the predicate describes. In describing part of this language-game—the part that involves the concept *intention* Anscombe describes part of the capacity that we refer to using the description “self-conscious”.

³⁸ Compare Geach, *Mental Acts*, ch. 26.